

PIONEER IRISH OF  
ONONDAGA

(ABOUT 1776-1847)

BY

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## PREFACE

THE story of the Pioneer Irish of Onondaga was begun at the request of Dr. John Van Duyn for the Onondaga Historical Association, to be one of a series of records of the different nations who settled within the County.

Any addition to the early history is most desirable, for in the scanty records of former days, the share of any one nation is scant indeed. The notes that refer to those of Irish birth or descent have been collected to become part of this record. The usual guide has been the name. The many names shared by the Irish and those of other nationalities are generally excluded, but if, occasionally, one is erroneously claimed, it is outnumbered by the many loyal Irish excluded because they bear names that are not characteristic.

Often good old surnames are found with singular Christian names in the children of an Irishman and his wife of another nation. In corresponding marriages, the history of Irish mothers is nearly always lost.

Many names lack proper classification because of errors in spelling, entailing double work in research. Again in many records the Irish ancestry is ignored. Some names, though associated with



other nations, are borne by native Irishmen who disclaim alien blood.

The original part of these notes was collected through interviews with early settlers or their descendants. Rarely have family records been available. Only a few of the great number who came to Onondaga in its first half-century are here represented. To record the history of these Irish Pioneers has been the motive of this work.

The arrangement of the material is approximately chronologic in that portion of the work that is devoted to Salina. In the case of the other eighteen towns of the County, where the population before 1847 was small, where nearly all the records before 1830 are lost, the extracts from the bibliography are transcribed without system. Further original research in these towns seemed profitless. Syracuse was second to Salina in importance until 1848.

The story of Onondaga's Irish in the American Revolution and other historical data have been used with a hope of arousing further interest in the historic wealth of this County.

The narratives and anecdotes interspersed sum up certain racial experiences during the social development of Onondaga.

The general conditions under which the pioneers lived, phases of which are revealed in the life stories of the individuals considered in this volume, were varied and made possible a re-

presentative development of Irish character and temperament.

The labor of collecting the material for this record has been made more easy by the kindness of the families interviewed. For other encouragement and assistance, acknowledgment is here made; and this acknowledgment is extended as freely to those who warned and sought to deter. For sustained interest, critical attention, and ready support in the production of this work during the past four years, thanks are due Daniel L. Doherty, T. Frank Dolan, and Edward Ryan.



## MATTHEW GEAGAN

A blacksmith shop in a young community is always a centre of activity and the smith is very likely to be a man of sterling worth. Such was Matthew Geagan, who came to Syracuse, to the old Fourth Ward, before it had fully emerged from the wilderness, about 1842. He was the son of Edward and Catharine D'Arcy Geagan of Kildare, and he had one brother John.

Matthew fell in love and energetically wooed and won beautiful Margaret Gray, seventeen years old. They spent most of the years of their long union in the old home in Burnet Avenue. Margaret was the daughter of James and Margaret Gray of the Parish of Drumard, County Longford. Among the visitors to the young bride and matron were the Indians. They entered without ceremony, helped themselves to what they wanted, and did not hesitate to ask for food stuffs they might happen to need. They brought often great baskets of berries to sell and other baskets and bead-work. Squaws wore skirt and shawl. The braves occasionally took a nap under the sidewalk, which was built a foot or more above the level of the swampy soil.